

VZCZCXRO3965  
RR RUEHCHI RUEHDT RUEHHM RUEHNN  
DE RUEHHI #0736 1720910  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
R 200910Z JUN 08  
FM AMEMBASSY HANOI  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8053  
INFO RUEHHM/AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH 4879  
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN 0057  
RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS HANOI 000736

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, DRL/IRF

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PREL](#) [KIRF](#) [PHUM](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: GVN and the Vatican Discuss Normalization, Property Issues

Refs: A) HANOI 0278, B) HANOI 0448, C) 07 HANOI 275

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The recent visit of a Vatican delegation for talks with the Government of Vietnam (GVN) did not result in any tangible progress on the issue of normalization of relations, although the issue was discussed. Discussions also addressed practical concerns of the Vietnamese Catholic community - particularly restraints on appointment of bishops and enrollment in seminaries and disputes over former Church properties. Despite Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung's 2007 visit to the Vatican, there was no indication that a reciprocal Papal visit to Vietnam is in the works. This recent delegation, the 15th in a series of such visits to Vietnam, highlights the commitment that both sides attach to working through issues affecting Vietnam's Catholic community, the second largest in Asia. End summary.

GVN-Vatican Relations: An Ongoing Dialogue  
-----

¶2. (U) On June 9-15, Monsignor Pietro Parolin, Under-secretary for Relations with States, led a Vatican delegation to Vietnam to meet with GVN officials and the Vietnamese Catholic community in Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, and the Central Highlands. Vatican delegations have regularly visited Vietnam for informal talks, making a total of fourteen trips since 1989. In the past, talks have produced some concessions, with the GVN easing restraints on the appointment of bishops and the enrollments in Vietnamese seminaries. In 2007, Vietnamese Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung visited the Vatican and met with Pope Benedict XVI; however, details regarding progress on normalization of bilateral relations have not been reported publicly.

Key Issues for Vietnam's Catholics Discussed  
-----

¶3. (U) The Vatican delegation met with Vietnam's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Pham Gia Khiem, as well as with Committee for Religious Affairs (CRA) Chairman Nguyen The Doanh, the Episcopal Council of the Vietnam Catholic Church, and the Hanoi People's Committee. According to a communique released by the Vatican, the two sides discussed a variety of issues including Episcopal appointments, normalization of bilateral relations, and the ongoing property dispute related to the Papal Nuncio property in Hanoi (ref A). The Vatican release went on to confirm that "the Working Group charged with defining terms and means [for the normalization of relations] will begin its work as soon as possible." However, Mr. Trinh Dinh Hung, Deputy Director, Europe Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, noted that while the Vatican side is ready to launch the Working Group, the Vietnamese side is "not ready yet." Mr. Hung did reveal that the Vietnamese side to the Working Group will be lead by a high level Ministry of Foreign Affairs official, "perhaps a Deputy Minister or Vice Minister."

¶4. (U) Mr. Hung, who participated in the GVN-Vatican meetings, confirmed that the two sides discussed the ongoing land dispute

related to the Papal Nuncio property in Hanoi in meetings with CRA and with Chairman Thao of the Hanoi People's Committee, stating that the final decision will come from the Hanoi People's Committee. He declined to make any prediction as to the timing of such a decision.

The Vatican statement characterized the discussions regarding the disputed property as frank and cordial and emphasized the "importance of continuing to pacify the situation, avoiding measures that may create contrary effects, and to maintain dialogue between interested parties in the search for adequate solutions."

¶15. (U) The trip included a visit to Quang Tri province, where the Vatican delegation thanked local authorities on the decision to return land surrounding the shrine of La Vang to the Church (ref B) and also expressed gratitude for the "will to face, along with the archdiocese of Hue, the outstanding problems for the effective implementation of the decision." A commemorative Mass was held at the shrine following the meeting.

¶16. (SBU) Comment: Regular visits by the Vatican continue to raise hopes amongst Catholic followers that Vietnam and the Vatican are on the verge of establishing formal diplomatic relations. Unlike last year's visit, however, this year there was no speculation about the delegation laying the groundwork for a Papal visit to Vietnam. While such visits are a welcome sign of the GVN's intention to maintain a regular dialogue with the Catholic leadership, ongoing differences regarding land issues, Episcopal appointments and limits on the conduct of social and charitable activities likely mean that the achievement of full normalized relations is still a long way off. End comment.

MICHALAK